

Guest Editorial

By Steve Huffaker, Director, Idaho Department of Fish and Game

A basic Mepps fishing lure sells for about \$3. That's about how much more hunters and anglers are being asked to pay to continue supporting some of the best hunting and fishing in the country.

You may have heard Fish and Game wants to adjust fees. Here's why. Just as businesses are paying more than five years ago for gasoline, electricity, salaries and insurance, so are we. Just as businesses have held down costs, so have we. Unlike most businesses, we haven't changed prices since May 2000. Now, we're asking to charge a little more for licenses and tags to cover increased costs and to continue providing the services hunters and anglers want. How much more? \$1.50 for a hunting license, \$3 for a fishing license - about the cost of a Mepps. Not much considering how much more it costs to do business than it did in 2000. Remember when we thought gas was expensive at \$1.60 a gallon?

Since the last time we adjusted prices, we've built new places to fish. We're getting better information about fish and wildlife populations, helping us improve hunting and fishing. We've increased the amount of time conservation officers spend patrolling.

To continue, we need a modest fee increase. Without it, we'll be back to cutting services you've told us are important. In the tight budget years before the last fee increase, we cut what some called "fat." Turns out, it wasn't "fat." Recently, we asked hunters, anglers, legislators, and others to help set priorities, to tell us what we need to do better. You told us "Get tough on poachers. Tell us more about fish and wildlife. Get us involved and give us more places to hunt and fish."

We heard you and we acted. We shifted money into the priorities you identified. We freed up funds to start programs like *Access Yes*, opening private land to hunters and anglers. We gave conservation officers new tools to catch criminals. We improved the Fish and Game web site and are making more information available to you.

You told us you liked what we've done, but that we need to do more. A couple dollars more per license will help. It will put volunteers on the ground improving mule deer winter range. It will help conservation officers catch hard-core poachers who steal

your fish and wildlife. It will keep hatcheries running to stock lakes, streams and ponds. It will open another 120,000 acres of private land to hunters and anglers.

We're trying to give hunters and anglers what they want and keep hunting and fishing affordable. Giving Fish and Game Commissioners the authority to change prices means you won't see prices jump every six or seven years. Each year, Commissioners will look at the budget and meet with you - fellow hunters and anglers - before deciding what to charge. Sometimes, there may be no change or some prices may go down. Other years, licenses and tags may go up 25 or 50 cents.

Some say "Run government like a business." That's what this does. Prices will be in line with costs. If prices get too high, people will stop buying. It's like any business, with one big difference. The Idaho legislature can turn down a change in prices.

This approach makes sense. It keeps hunting and fishing affordable. It gives Fish and Game the money to provide the services hunters and anglers want - increased enforcement of hunting and fishing rules, more information, and more access to private land for hunting and fishing.

Isn't that worth the price of a fishing lure?